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OLC 70-0243

2 April 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Proposal to Surface Satellite Photography

1. Speaking parochially, I think the proposal will create problems on the Hill:

a. We have emphasized in congressional briefings that this material is probably our most precious remaining secret and urged all concerned to treat it accordingly.

b. If it is surfaced now to serve a "partisan" purpose, the one who does so may be exposed to charges of playing fast and loose with vital security information.

c. At the same time the Agency may be vulnerable to charges of excessive and unnecessary secrecy in trying to keep the lid on in the past.

d. In any event it will be hard to keep the lid on anything from here on out--the obvious lesson which many will draw is that the most sensitive "sources and methods" are expendable whenever the political or policy stakes are high enough.

e. Lastly, it will be hard to hold the line after the first act of the striptease--the audience with its whetted appetite may be expected to cry for more and yet still more in the days ahead.

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2. At the risk of belaboring the obvious, I'd also like to venture some personal comments on the likely Soviet reaction:

a. In the present state of apparent division, uncertainty, and instability in the Soviet leadership such a move at this point in time might have a traumatic effect.

b. For one thing, our action will be seen as a move to embarrass and discredit the Soviet State. This in turn would play into the hands of the "hard-liners" who presumably have been arguing in Kremlin councils that true accommodation is an illusion.

c. It may also spur the Soviet leadership to some sort of sharp overt reaction. Historically Soviet leaders have put up with quite a bit of annoyance from abroad provided it isn't unduly publicized. Like the wife of an errant husband, they'll sometimes tolerate a lot so long as there is no publicity, but they cannot stand the humiliation of public taunts.

d. The breakoff of the Paris talks in the wake of the U-2 affair is but one typical example of the characteristic Russian response in such circumstances. Also relevant, I think, is the fact that following our gleeful publication of Khrushchev's secret speech the Kremlin apparently closed ranks in the face of public humiliation, thus delaying by many months Khrushchev's attempts to introduce a more rational and flexible foreign policy. And it is my impression that the Kremlin tried initially to keep its difficulties with the Chinese under control, but eventually felt compelled by the public provocations of Peking to retaliate in kind.

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3. In sum, I think anyone who has spent much time pondering Russian behavior would agree that for generations these people have considered secrecy perhaps their most important strategic weapon. This secrecy is, I am sure, designed quite as much to cover up weaknesses and failures as to conceal strength. But in any event, to the Russian mind the foreigner who attempts to tear away this secrecy, and advertise his success in doing so, is not seeking an accommodation, but an advantage. So I fear that one of the most unfortunate ramifications of the actions proposed might concern the SALT talks. It would be easy for the hard-liners in Moscow to argue that this U.S. ploy was a sort of threat or blackmail--a public proclamation that we had succeeded in breaking through their shell of security and that they had therefore better do business on our terms.

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